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ABSTRACT

This collection of guidelines and worksheets provides information on the development of good communications skills, aspects of interpersonal communication, and elements of administrator effectiveness in the field of education. Specifically mentioned are a public relations project; coping with rumors and grapevine information; social networking; criteria for publications; guidelines for principals; personnel management; newsletters; internal public relations; parent teacher conferences; mass media interviews; student discipline; telephone surveys; involving non-parents in the schools; and developing effective school community relationships. (DB)

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Building and Communicating Your Image

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WHO ARE OUR PUBLICS?

Internal

(Those groups of people within the family of education or directly associated with the school system, or a school building.)

External

(Those groups of people who are outside of the family or have indirect relationships with the school system, or a school building.)

Your Group's TOP Four Priority Publics (Consensus): _____

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Total Workshop Group's TOP Four Priority Publics (Consensus): _____

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Things We're Doing Right

List those things your district/building is now doing that is right:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

10)

What do our publics need to know about us?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

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A PR COMMUNICATION PROJECT (Model)

1. Briefly state the project:

- Involve senior citizens living in the school neighborhood in activities at the local school.

2. Purpose(s) of project:

- To involve these valuable community resources in an active school role to help them share their talents and to also provide services to them.
- To provide feedback from these community residents about their views of the school program.

3. Procedures:

- Compile a list of senior citizens living in the immediate school neighborhood (and/or district). This can be done in several ways:
 - Parent/teacher volunteers canvas neighborhood
 - Contact local churches and organized senior citizen groups
 - Check with the central office to see if this group has already been identified and is participating in a "Golden Card Group"--or other district-wide program.
- Send a letter to senior citizens that you have been able to identify with a survey asking about ways they might participate actively in school:
 - sharing their skills in crafts, photography, woodworking, travel films, music, etc.
 - serving as a volunteer to help students with reading, mathematics, etc.
 - serving as a volunteer in helping get out a newsletter
 - participating in the hot lunch program
 - those "at home" needing special attention (welcome cards and visits from students at the school)
- Compile information and responses and set up meetings for those willing to work at the school. Invite them to a morning coffee or luncheon, and show them the school: explain the program and activities, and assign a special teacher with whom they will be working. Develop schedules and calendars for activities and see if one of the senior volunteers will take on the assignment of coordinator of senior citizens.

4. Resources:

- Postage for mailing
- Funds for breakfast or luncheon meeting
- Selection of teacher/assignments to work with senior citizens
- Selection of teacher/parent/volunteers to work with senior citizens at home

5. Timing of project:

- Project will begin on _____ and run for _____ weeks.
- Schedules for senior citizen activities will be developed by _____ and run for _____ weeks.

6. Assessment:

- Each senior citizen will be asked to fill out an anonymous "reaction" form and leave it in the school office at the end of the first month of full activities, and again at the end of the first year of the program.

A PR COMMUNICATION PROJECT

For: _____
(indicate PUBLIC for which the project is designed)

1. State Project:
2. List purposes of project:
3. List procedures (tasks to be assigned):
4. List resources needed:
5. Develop time-line for project:
6. Develop evaluation/assessment procedure to be used:

HOW TO CONQUER THE GRAPEVINE

"If you want to get the word out, start a rumor."

That's a cliché, but it's true! The grapevines through which rumors travel are effective vehicles for disseminating information.

There are two basic reasons:

1. Grapevines allow you to reach others face-to-face. A message conveyed through the grapevine has high impact because it is delivered personally.
2. Grapevines automatically take your message to an existing system (network). Everyone is linked to someone else...personally or professionally. Researchers know nine of every ten people who receive a personal message will tell ten others...and one of every ten (the "professional talkers") will tell more than twenty others.

This exercise is designed to help you harness the power of the grapevine. It will help you share positive information about schools (and find out what people think). It requires thirty seconds of your time daily.

STEP ONE

List five people you know who live in the community and have no affiliation with the schools; i.e., they are not related to school employees, they are not school volunteers, they are not members of a parent organization or school booster club, etc. Name only those people you will "bump into" next week.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

STEP TWO

List five people you know who live in the community and are in some way affiliated with the schools. Again, name only those people with whom you will have direct contact next week.

Name	Affiliation
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____

STEP THREE

Now we need some messages to put in the grapevine. They must be short and easy to understand.

List five positive things about your school district:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

STEP FOUR

Some grapevines are "better" than others—they will give your message more credibility and/or more significant distribution. These grapevines often include one or more members of a community's "power structure."

List the three most influential people in your community:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

STEP FIVE

The basic idea is to get your message to key influentials. This assumes you know the people you identified in Step Four and will have direct contact with them next week.

If you don't know and/or won't have direct contact with the key influentials, you can work on reaching them through a "contact" you have.

But nothing is lost if you don't have direct or indirect contact with key influentials. You can place a message in your own grapevine.

Action Steps

1. Are any of the key influentials on the list you developed in Step One? If so, they should be prime targets for your message. Write their names on the GO FORTH AND CONQUER form.
2. Are any of the key influentials on the list you developed in Step Two? If so, write their names on the GO FORTH AND CONQUER form.
3. If you can't reach key influentials directly, can you reach them indirectly (through an affiliation)? Look at the names in Step Two. If you know someone who is affiliated with a key influential, write the name of the person you know on the GO FORTH AND CONQUER form.
4. Use the remaining names in Step One and Step Two to complete your GO FORTH AND CONQUER form.

GO FORTH AND CONQUER

Write the names of five people you know and will have contact with next week. Then select the message (from Step Three) you will personally deliver to each of these people. (You can repeat the same message, but you must reach five different people.)

Do this and you'll reach at least fifty people in five days. (You might want to keep track of how long it takes for your message to come back to you through the grapevine.)

Day	Target	Message
Monday	1. _____	1. _____
Tuesday	2. _____	2. _____
Wednesday	3. _____	3. _____
Thursday	4. _____	4. _____
Friday	5. _____	5. _____



Criteria for Publications

The following criteria were established by NSPRA for evaluating publications.

- ☐ Does the design tell the reader at a glance what the publication is about?
- ☐ Does the layout typography make the publication easy to read? Does it have columns, white space, subheads, etc.?
- ☐ Does the publication follow the 30-3-30 principle, offering something to a reader whether he or she is going to spend 30 seconds, 3 minutes, or 30 minutes on it?
- ☐ Do the graphics and art work enhance the printed word (including quality printing, color, or paper stock, ink, etc.)?
- ☐ Are pictures large, clear, well cropped, and show live action? Is there a caption for most pictures?
- ☐ Do you follow these guidelines: If typeset, a serif type is usually recommended and body type should be 9, 10, or 11 pt. Copy lines should be no longer than two alphabets or 52 characters.
- ☐ Do headlines use action words and are they set in caps and lower case? (Sans serif type is most frequently used.)
- ☐ Is the writing style suitable to the audience for which the publication is targeted and is the style maintained through the publication? Would the material pass "Gunning Fox Index" level of grade 9 for general writing?
- ☐ Is there a good lead to capture the reader's attention?
- ☐ Are articles written in inverted pyramid format with key points in the first paragraph, especially in newsletters?
- ☐ Is publication material written for the information needs and interests of the audience for which it is designed?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

Principals

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Do you emphasize the PR responsibilities of each staff member in your building? ☐ Do you provide an open, two-way leadership style to stimulate healthy communication in your building? ☐ Do you involve students, staff, and community in meaningful advisory roles for school programs? ☐ Do you publicly praise students and staff for their accomplishments? ☐ Do you effectively use your principal's bulletin as a PR vehicle? ☐ Do you have a planned, two-way communication program? ☐ Do you have an updated, building-level crisis communication plan? ☐ Do you run in-service workshops on PR for your staff members? ☐ Is your school building considered a "good neighbor" in your community? ☐ Do you know your immediate school neighbors on a face-to-face basis? ☐ Do you respond promptly to telephone calls from parents and the media? ☐ Do you have a news gathering network within your building? ☐ Do you know the reporters who cover your school, and have you asked them how you may be more helpful to them and they to you? ☐ Have you invited community groups (realtors, senior citizens, rotary, etc.) to your building? ☐ Do you have a building newsletter sent to parents and other key external audiences? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Do you distribute your student newspaper or yearbook to public places within your community? ☐ Do you encourage volunteers to work in your building? ☐ Are you visible to staff and students? ☐ Are you accessible to staff and students? ☐ Do you periodically survey your students, staff, and parents on school-related issues? ☐ Do you encourage students and staff to provide opportunities for entertaining and servicing the community? ☐ Do you speak to community and service groups at least three times a year? ☐ Do you brag with sensible pride about the accomplishments of your staff and students? ☐ Do you use your outdoor message board for substantive achievement messages (e.g., 20 students inducted into National Honor Society) instead of "Have a Nice Day!" ☐ Are you aware of the various publics in your school's attendance area and which audiences need special attention from your school building? ☐ Do you support parent groups and provide assistance in any way you can? ☐ Do you encourage your teachers to communicate more effectively with their students' parents? Do you provide the resources and supplies (telephones, good news stationery, etc.) to help them in this area? |
|--|---|

- ☐ Do you provide flexible hours for counselors to work and meet with parents?
- ☐ Do you open your building and playing facilities for community groups?
- ☐ Do you orient new staff members and substitute teachers?
- ☐ Do you say or write "thank you" to students, staff, and community residents who make extra efforts?
- ☐ Do you use the four-point communication test when decisions are made:
 - (1) Who needs to know this?
 - (2) What do they need to know?
 - (3) What is the best time and vehicle to communicate this?

- (4) How will we know the message has been received?
- ☐ Do you attend workshops on PR and take a few staff members with you?
- ☐ Do you encourage staff and students to create special activities that shed a positive light on your school building?
- ☐ Do you hold "family meetings" when all building employees get together—just not the teaching staff?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

101 WAYS TO GIVE RECOGNITION TO VOLUNTEERS

By

Vern Lake

Volunteer Services Consultant, Minnesota Department of Public Welfare

Continuously, but always inconclusively, the subject of recognition is discussed by directors and coordinators of volunteer programs. There is great agreement as to its importance but great diversity in its implementation.

Listed below are 101 possibilities gathered from hither and yon. The duplication at 1 and 101 is for emphasis. The blank at 102 is for the beginning of your own list.

I think it is important to remember that recognition is not so much something you do as it is something you are. It is a sensitivity to others as persons, not a strategy for discharging obligations.

1. Smile.
2. Put up a volunteer suggestion box.
3. Treat to a soda.
4. Reimburse assignment-related expenses.
5. Ask for a report.
6. Send a birthday card.
7. Arrange for discounts.
8. Give service stripes.
9. Maintain a coffee bar.
10. Plan annual ceremonial occasions.
11. Invite to staff meeting.
12. Recognize personal needs and problems.
13. Accommodate personal needs and problems.
14. Be pleasant.
15. Use in an emergency situation.
16. Provide a baby sitter.
17. Post Honor Roll in reception area.
18. Respect their wishes.
19. Give informal teas.
20. Keep challenging them.
21. Send a Thanksgiving Day card to the volunteer's family.
22. Provide a nursery.
23. Say "Good Morning."
24. Greet by name.
25. Provide good pre-service training.
26. Help develop self-confidence.
27. Award plaques to sponsoring group.
28. Take time to explain fully.
29. Be verbal.
30. Motivate agency VIP's to converse with them.
31. Hold rap sessions.

32. Give additional responsibility.
33. Afford participation in team planning.
34. Respect sensitivities.
35. Enable to grow on the job.
36. Enable to grow out of the job.
37. Send newsworthy information to the media.
38. Have wine and cheese tasting parties.



39. Ask client-patient to evaluate their work-service.
40. Say "Good Afternoon."
41. Honor their preferences.
42. Create pleasant surroundings.
43. Welcome to staff coffee breaks.
44. Enlist to train other volunteers.
45. Have a public reception.
46. Take time to talk.
47. Defend against hostile or negative staff.
48. Make good plans.
49. Commend to supervisory staff.
50. Send a valentine.
51. Make thorough pre-arrangements.
52. Persuade "personnel" to equate volunteer experience with work experience.
53. Admit to partnership with paid staff.
54. Recommend to prospective employer.
55. Provide scholarships to volunteer conferences or workshops.
56. Offer advocacy roles.
57. Utilize as consultants.

58. Write them thank you notes.
59. Invite participation in policy formulation.
60. Surprise with coffee and cake.
61. Celebrate outstanding projects and achievements.
62. Nominate for volunteer awards.
63. Have a "Presidents Day" for new presidents of sponsoring groups.



THANKS

64. Carefully match volunteer with job.
65. Praise them to their friends.
66. Provide substantive in-service training.
67. Provide useful tools in good working condition.
68. Say "Good Night."
69. Plan staff and volunteer social events.
70. Be a real person.
71. Rent billboard space for public laudation.
72. Accept their individuality.
73. Provide opportunities for conferences and evaluation.
74. Identify age groups.
75. Maintain meaningful file.
76. Send impromptu fun cards.

77. Plan occasional extravaganzas.
78. Instigate client planned surprises.
79. Utilize purchased newspaper space.



82. Plan a "Recognition Edition" of the agency newsletter.
83. Color code name tags to indicate particular achievements (hours, years, unit, etc.).
84. Send commendatory letters to prominent public figures.
85. Say "we missed you."
86. Praise the sponsoring group or club.
87. Promote staff smiles.
88. Facilitate personal maturation.
89. Distinguish between groups and individuals in the group.
90. Maintain safe working conditions.
91. Adequately orientate.
92. Award special citations for extraordinary achievements.
93. Fully indoctrinate regarding the agency.
94. Send Christmas cards.
95. Be familiar with the details of assignments.
96. Conduct community-wide, cooperative, inter-agency recognition events.
97. Plan a theater party.
98. Attend a sports event.
99. Have a picnic.
100. Say "Thank You."
101. Smile



102.



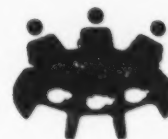
"GOIN' OUT IN STYLE"

- With the announcement of the decision to close a school the school administrative staff should make an immediate resolve to accept the decision gracefully and to accent the positive.
- Send students out in June to their new schools with confidence in themselves and their ability to succeed in the new schools, and with a positive orientation toward these schools.
- An all-school and all-community campaign was launched with the theme "Goin' Out in Style":
 - Ordered buttons for all students, staff and interested parents with the theme "Goin' Out in Style."
 - Staff wore buttons for a two-week period to build up interest in the idea--students given buttons at Kick-Off Assembly Campaign.
- Planned campaign to emphasize three elements:
 - Aimed to do the unexpected--for example, at the traditional Christmas music assembly, three Santas (the principal, assistant principal and counselor) suddenly appeared and gave candy canes to every student.
 - Celebrated each "last" event--the last home basketball game--not in mourning, but as a tribute to the school and in memory of more than 10,000 students who had graduated from the school.
 - Sought continuous and widespread involvement of students, staff and parents in planning the calendar of events.
- The planning committee included teachers, students and parents who planned special events extending over the second semester of the school year.
Events planned:
 - International night festival
 - Inter-school visits for students to visit their new schools
 - Special historical issues of the student newspaper
 - Special class trips
 - Alumni night
 - Special graduation exercises

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Morale and attitude among staff, students and parents as school is closed.



YOUR BUILDING NEWSLETTER

- **Format**—keep the newsletter short and simple. An 8½" x 11" sheet printed on one or two sides is sufficient for a principal's newsletter to parents. Make it attractive, neat, well-organized, accurate and publish regularly, not whenever "there's enough news to print."
- **Writing**—KISS is the word to remember—Keep It Simple, Stupid! Use simple words, short sentences, short paragraphs and action verbs. Avoid like the plague all educational gobbledygook. Who really understands "cognitive and affective domains?" Include in the lead—who, what, when, where, why and how so the reader learns the gist of the story even if he/she reads only the lead. Standardize your style.
- **Art**—If you use photographs or clip art (drawings clipped out of a "clip book") for sale from such companies as Educational Communication Center (Box 657, Camp Hill, Pa. 17011), use good ones, both technically and ones that say something. Have actions in photos.
- **Special tips for typewritten newsletters**—Use generous margins, up to about 7/8 of an inch. Single space the story itself and double space between paragraphs. No paragraphs longer than eight lines. Double space between a headline and the story. Triple space between the end of one story and the headline of the next story. Don't handletter headlines; use art transfer type available at a good art supply store. Don't use italics (except possibly for short captions), or script type, and use a pica typewriter, preferably with serif type.
- **Content**—Parents want to know: How their child is doing, what's taught and how, special services, policies (particularly as they pertain to their child), how the money is spent.
- **Distribution**—Publications sent home with students above the fifth grade probably won't get there. Mail it. Consider a bulk mailing permit. Ask the PTA or a parent group to defray mailing costs. Maintain an up-to-date mailing list—include your KEY COMMUNICATORS, and the community power structure. Consider distribution to places of business around the school neighborhood, and to all churches or synagogues.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (A schedule to be developed by local building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Conduct an informal, face-to-face survey. Send out a simple questionnaire. Make random phone calls. Set up a cross-section advisory committee.



SET UP A KEY COMMUNICATORS NETWORK

- With the help of the total school staff and members of the parent group, identify those people in the school area who regularly talk to large numbers of people:
 - barbers
 - beauticians
 - clergy
 - realtors
 - merchants
 - gas station operators
 - school crossing guards
 - postmaster/and or mailcarriers
 - key students
 - key staff members
- After the list has been made the principal should send a letter to those identified advising them that they have been selected to serve as KEY COMMUNICATORS and explaining the nature of the organization.
- Those invitees that accept are asked to attend a small group meeting of about seven of the KEY COMMUNICATORS.
- The small group meetings are informal and designed to build confidence between KEY COMMUNICATORS and the school principal--to see him/her as a person who cares about kids, understands that problems exist, and wants to find ways to improve the school program.
- Ask KEY COMMUNICATORS to call the school principal when they hear a rumor and tell them they will be immediately apprised of information about the schools when a problem, challenge or need exists.
- Help KEY COMMUNICATORS develop solid rapport with the school staff so they in turn can help the community gain confidence in "their" school.
- Send a steady flow of information to KEY COMMUNICATORS. The principal should call them periodically to ask what they are hearing and any suggestions they may have.

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

ASSESSMENT: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)



INTERNAL PR

■ People Things To Do:

- If you have a district communication specialist, make sure he/she is a part of the superintendent's cabinet. Your specialist will be totally informed and aware of the "why" behind decisions.
- Establish advisory committees:
 - cabinet
 - staff (support and professional)
 - task oriented
- Breakfast or luncheon with the superintendent and/or principal.
- In-building visits by principals/central office personnel.
- Fair and open decision-making process--make certain that the total staff is aware of the process and has opportunities for input.

■ Publication/Paper Things To Do:

- Internal Newsletter--once a week or once every two weeks with information for, about and by the total staff.
- School Board Wrap-Up--a morning-after board meeting report.
- Summary Board Agenda--for employee bulletin board prior to every meeting.
- Mini-Minutes of staff meetings.
- Policy manuals.
- Special publications for special purposes--rules and regulations, district calendars, handbooks for parents, etc.
- Employee handbooks.
- Organizational charts.
- Suggestion boxes.
- Certificates of recognition.

■ Upward Communication:

- Communication is a two-way street, and central office administrators need to learn to listen and make use of employee feedback.
- Employees need to make certain they provide continuing input into the two-way communication flow.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be determined by local district staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be determined by local district staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Conduct an annual survey of the staff to determine attitudes. Have a staff committee work with administrators in development, tabulation and compilation of the survey. Publish results.



PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

- Help teachers plan for conference.
- Help parent(s) prepare for conference.
- Help student(s) understand that teachers and parents are working as a team to improve his/her educational program.

PROCEDURES:

- Develop a conference schedule that provides opportunities for career parents to attend early morning, evening or weekend conferences.
- Suggest that parents prepare a list of things that will help the teacher understand their child better—special health needs or problems, outside interests, hobbies, feelings about school, relationship with brothers and sisters.
- Suggest that parents make a list of things they want to find out from the teacher. For example: services and programs the school offers, discipline policy, grading policy, extracurricular activities, daily schedule, homework policy, health and safety program.
- Discuss the child's school progress—ability to do school work, current level in reading and math including samples of work he/she has done, special interests and abilities, books and materials the child is using, how he/she gets along with others, how he/she feels about self and behavior in and out of class.
- Suggest that parents talk over the conference beforehand with their child to get ideas about what should be covered and to help relieve anxiety about the conference. After the conference suggest that parents tell the child what was discussed (omitting any information he/she may not be mature enough to understand), and be certain to talk about any changes or new plans. Be positive.
- Begin conference on a positive note and listen carefully and sympathetically.
- Get away from your desk and sit at a small conference table or student desk so there is no barrier between you and the parents.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local school building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Each parent is given a three-question survey form: Did this conference accomplish what you wanted it to? What was the most effective part of the conference? What should we do differently next time? The questionnaires are deposited in a box at the school entrance or on the principal's desk.



MEDIA TIP SHEET

- To keep the various news media supplied with a good selection of school news possibilities for use as they choose.
- To improve coverage of "good news" about the school.
- To keep the fact that the school exists before news reporters every week.
- To help make the reporter's job easier and thus improve rapport between school and the press.

PROCEDURES:

- Keep an eye out for and a file of interesting upcoming activities for the "Tip Sheet."
- Talk with teachers to see what's going on and figure out ways to make activities fit news requirements—i.e., picture possibilities, time activity can be scheduled, availability of someone to tell the story.
- Keep the write-up of each item short—include day, date, time, address, short descriptive sentences centering around news peg. Don't tell whole "gory" story. The media will (and prefer to) develop it in their own way.

TIMING OF PROJECT:

- Send weekly; mailing next week's tips toward the end of each week to allow time for scheduling by media.

RESOURCES:

- A little staff time—two hours per week will do.
- A duplicating machine.
- A little postage.

ASSESSMENT: Count number of stories used. Questionnaire filled out by media reporters.



PR PLAN FOR THE BASIC SKILLS

- Help parents and other key publics understand the school's commitment to provide the best possible education in the basics.
- Involve parents and other selected publics in the curriculum planning process.
- Help parents and other publics understand how students are performing in the basic skills.
- Give parents and other publics insight into programs being offered.
- Gain information from parents and others about how the programs are working.
- Gain support for the programs which are developed.

PROCEDURE:

- Identify publics who need to know about basic programs and results.
- Adopt a curriculum planning process involving parents, students and other appropriate publics.
- Meet with the school system cabinet, school principals and curriculum developers to determine what is basic, to gain information and to test communication ideas--seek input.
- Hold inservice sessions for principals and staff members to assure that all understand basics programs and how they should work.
- Present the curriculum proposal to the board of education for study and adoption.
- Prepare a slide presentation or videotape production on each program, to be shown to students, parents, the community at large, on television, etc. Couple the presentation with an explanatory brochure.
- Hold "family meetings" in each school to explain program to total staff (professional and support staff).
- Hold roundtable discussions at PTA and other parent group meetings. Display materials and discuss programs with parents at Open House events.
- Ask each teacher and building administrator to make "one phone call a week" to a parent to ask how things are going. Comments will be recorded on feedback sheets and kept on file by the principal.
- The schools will feed back progress reports to the board, community and other publics through newsletters, the news media and other channels.
- Encourage staff members to share interesting stories about programs for building newsletters or distribution to the news media.

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Comments received by principals from a "phone call a week." Possible pre-and post-surveys to determine understanding and feelings. Level of involvement and support. Accomplishments of communication projects.



CALL WITH A GOOD MESSAGE

- Pledge a total staff commitment to call one or more parents each week with "good news" about his/her child...to compliment and to express friendly interest.
- Make every effort to gain the cooperation of the teacher's association, building principals and others who might be making calls.
- Prepare guidelines including the cooperative objectives established by school district administration and teachers.
- Provide a proper facility. If a teacher must stand up at the secretary's desk or ask the principal to leave his/her office in order to use the telephone, it will be difficult for the program to succeed.
- Provide a reporting system. Maintain a log in the principal's office, or have a teacher, volunteer or school secretary log the total calls made each week, month, etc.

RESOURCES:

- Time must be provided for teachers to make the calls.
- Additional telephone lines may be needed to handle increased loads and at the same time make lines available for regular school business.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Tabulation of the calls made with a reaction sheet for teacher and/or principal to report their evaluation of each individual call. Compilation of this information will provide helpful input on attitudes of those called as well as their reaction to the call.



TAKE A STUDENT ATTITUDE SURVEY

- Discover what students really think about their school experience.
- Locate problems, interests and needs of students as individuals.
- Help teachers approach students as individuals and help them with their problems.
- Help students deal with their feelings.

PROCEDURES:

- Confidentiality must be maintained in evaluating the form. Students generally will answer in terms of what they really feel only if they are sure their answers will be kept confidential.
- Stress that no one but the teacher will read the answers.
- Provide copies of the Survey Form to all teachers who plan to administer it to their students.

Dallas Pupil Survey Form

1. What is now giving you the greatest satisfaction?
2. What do you like most about school?
3. What do you like least about school?
4. What is your greatest problem at the present time?
5. What are you most afraid of?

HERE IS YOUR CHANCE TO SAY EXACTLY WHAT YOU THINK.
You may write anything you like, but it must be just what you think.

6. Today I feel _____
7. When I have to read I _____
8. I get angry when _____
9. To be grown up _____
10. My idea of a good time is _____
11. I can't understand why _____
12. School is _____

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local school building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: (To be developed by local school building staff.)



STUDENT DISCIPLINE—THE PRINCIPAL'S RESPONSIBILITY

The major expressed concern of parents and patrons of public high schools is student discipline. Determining exactly what is meant by "Student Discipline" is a very difficult task as its definition varies from person to person. Most parents and patrons agree, however, that the principal is the person who is responsible for establishing a school climate that enhances the learning and teaching environment. In establishing a good school climate the principal must be able to communicate effectively with students, parents, community members and the total school staff.

These practices listed below are helpful in efforts to establish a positive school climate for teaching and learning:

- Good News - Happy Calls—The Good News Gram is a positive individual note to a parent about his/her child. The Happy Call is the same but is a telephone call rather than a note.
- Student Supreme Court—Students who are judged to be guilty of some infraction by an administrator and who feel they are unjustly accused have the right to appeal this decision to the Student Supreme Court. This court is composed of the student council representatives from that student's grade level. The student who feels that he has been unjustly accused meets with the council members and the principal, as well as the administrator or teacher who alleges the student has broken some rule or regulation. If the council members decide the student is innocent, there is no disciplinary action taken against him. If found guilty, he receives the punishment that was given to him initially from the administrator from whom he was seeking appeal. If the Student Supreme Court indicates guilty and recommends leniency, their wishes are taken into consideration.
- Academic Letter—Senior students who maintain a 3.5 grade point ratio are given an academic letter at an Awards Night program that is held just for them and their parents. The only requirement for this award is the GPR.
- Principal Listens: Once each semester the principal meets with the entire teaching staff during their free period. This provides opportunity to hear from the teachers. The same process of the Principal Listens is held during lunch once each nine weeks for students who wish to come.
- Evening Detention—The purpose of the Evening Detention Program is to provide administrators with an alternative for suspendable offenses other than having the student miss instructional time. This alternative could be used prior to the in-school suspension or a regular out-of-school suspension. The program meets on Thursday evenings from 5:00 to 8:00 with transportation the sole responsibility of the student. Students are assigned for no more than three hours and not less than one and one-half hours, and must report with sufficient assigned work from classroom teachers to fully occupy their assigned time. The professional who runs the Evening Detention Program is paid \$10 per hour and is responsible for communication back to the administrator from whom the evening detention assignment was made. If it is determined that the student needs remedial help, materials such as outlined in the in-school suspension program are used.



MONTHLY TELEPHONE SURVEY

- Call 50 parents each month selected at random from parents lists requesting their answers to no more than five key questions:
 - SAMPLE: Are you receiving the school newsletter?
 - What suggestions do you have for ways we could improve it?
 - Do you like the present grading system?
 - Are you receiving enough information about school plans?
 - Would you like to have evening conference hours?
- Enlist the help of five volunteers to make 10 phone calls each month—either from their homes or from school phones.
- Prepare a script with the questions asking the callers to identify themselves, saying that they are calling for the school and asking the person called to take a few minutes to answer five questions.
- Develop a sheet on which the callers can write their answers or provide a check-off list for them: "Yes, No, Comments..."
- Involve the total staff in determining questions to be asked each month, and solicit suggestions from parents as well.
- Provide a feedback system on the surveys. Report that you are going to ask the questions and then report the answers. You will find that this builds interest in the program.
- Provide answers to concerns of those called. Have the volunteer callers take down any questions or concerns and call back with the information requested. If the answer will take additional time, call immediately to report that you are collecting the information needed and will call as soon as you have it.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: (To be determined by local building staff.)



INVOLVING NON-PARENTS IN THE SCHOOLS

As the population ages and school enrollments shrink, educators no longer have a choice about including non-parents in the school communication network. Non-parents are making more and more of the financial decisions affecting schools. The Columbus (Ohio) Public Schools involved 50,000 non-parents in a program to COME AND SEE FOR YOURSELF. Here are 25 of their ideas:

1. Set a goal of one non-parent visitor per pupil with incentives for pupils. Have visitors sign a guest book.
2. Make a mailing list of non-parents living near your school. Have students write personal invitations and enclose a self-portrait so the visitor will recognize them.
3. Send "picketers" out to shopping centers with signs urging people to "See For Yourself," or place "See For Yourself" posters in neighborhood store fronts, other public buildings and meeting places.
4. Place a classified ad in the neighborhood paper with a "See For Yourself" invitation.
5. Send "See For Yourself" invitations to area churches to put in their weekly bulletins.
6. Get area merchants to provide "See For Yourself" coupons which can be exchanged for "freebies."
7. Start a challenge chain—challenge a well-known Columbusite to come to school, then ask that person to challenge another to "See For Yourself."
8. Compose a school song. Serenade the non-parents in your neighborhood, with an invitation to "See For Yourself."
9. Watch the birth announcements in the newspaper for addresses in your neighborhood. Send congratulatory notes along with an invitation to visit school.
10. As a class project, have students write personal invitations to a non-parent neighbor.
11. Contact employers in the vicinity of your school. Ask them to release employees for a school visit.
12. Contact real estate offices in your area and invite them to hold their next staff meeting at your school.
13. Contact business and civic organizations and suggest they tour your school in lieu of one of their monthly meetings.
14. Invite Senior Citizens to:
 - Attend a school event
 - Show their travel slides to a class
 - Volunteer in the library
 - Read to children
 - Eat lunch at school
15. Offer discounts or free admission to school events to Golden Buckeye Card Holders.
16. Invite Seniors to play in the school band or orchestra.
17. Hold a 1930s or '40s dance and invite non-parents.
18. Plan a staff meeting around some "How To" speaker—preparing tax returns, estate planning, family budgeting, etc.—and invite non-parents to attend.
19. Have a "Family Day" when all the members of your school staff invite their families to visit school.
20. Contact alumni and invite them to return. Try to arrange to have some retired teachers to greet them.
21. Honor a "good citizen of the week" with an invitation to lunch or a special program.
22. Invite local craftsmen to demonstrate their crafts throughout the year. Then have students display what they learned and invite the craftsmen back.
23. Invite a disc jockey to visit the school—perhaps even do a remote broadcast.
24. If you have an empty classroom, offer it to a public health agency.
25. Use non-parents as judges for student contests.



BUILD PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AT THE LOCAL SCHOOL

The question is not whether to build public confidence in public education in the United States of America as the nation, and its public schools, step cautiously, perhaps tentatively, through the fiscal and political uncertainties of the 1980s. THE QUESTION, rather, IS HOW?

...Public confidence cannot be bought. It cannot be bartered. It can't be begged or borrowed or achieved through sleight of hand. It must be earned through actions and a great deal of planned, systematic, communication effort, involving the entire school district family--PROFESSIONAL AND SUPPORT STAFF MEMBERS ALIKE.

1. There must be COMMITMENT on the part of the school board and superintendent. And, perhaps most important--and often overlooked--there must be commitment on the part of the people out there: teachers, aides, bus drivers, principals, librarians, secretaries, custodians--those people who deal person-to-person with the public every day.
2. The commitment must be absolute, complete, total. It must run deep. It must pervade the very fabric of the school district. It must encompass all means of communication from the superintendent's address to the Rotary to chatter by employees at bridge clubs and poker tables and swimming pools and barrooms.

BUILD YOUR OWN CONFIDENCE CAMPAIGN:

- Public confidence begins at home. The solution is better interpersonal communication and increased internal communication efforts.
- Determine your public's confidence level. You need to know what your various publics in the community think about the schools, what they would like to know about them, where they are presently getting their information about schools and what they would like their schools to be like in the future.
- Reach out to your community. You must have a structured plan for encouraging valid two-way communication, for generating feedback from a reliable, objective network of community representatives day after day, month after month, year after year.
- Tell your own POSITIVE story using every communication tool known--both mass communication and interpersonal communication techniques.
- Build confidence with the media. Develop an ongoing campaign with the media to provide them with information about the positive things happening in your schools, as well as the facts.
- Start your confidence campaign at the local building. Any confidence campaign must include a total effort on the part of staffs of each local school.

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Effective school-community relations

SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE

by Carol MacDougall

Teacher strikes. Special education. The tax burden. The AIDS crisis. Public education today is indeed facing many issues warranting thoughtful study, decisions, and adjustments. At the same time public scrutiny and criticism of our school systems are becoming increasingly commonplace.

Public school systems once functioned as sacred entities, bastions of academic training and discipline, providing a constitutionally ensured service for the youth of the nation. Fifty years ago, the public schools were considered sacrosanct institutions with nary a hint of judgment or interference by parents or the general public. Educators received modest financial support but bountiful respect and professional independence in the pursuit of their idealistic dreams and realistic goals. Pressures for expanded curricular offerings were limited primarily to societal demands, particularly from the government and influential national organizations. Parents ventured into the schools only when invited for a prepared program or teacher conference.

Increased involvement

The last two decades have seen a dramatic change in popular attitudes toward the schools. With an increasing concern over the quality of our educational system, parents and the general public have become more aware and more critical of their individual community's school programs. Community members are insisting on accountability of the budgets, programs, and productivity of public schools. The local public

wants more information about the schools and what the students are being taught.

As a result, school board members and administrators need to stop and take a good look at how they are perceived by their community—how their decisions and actions are received locally. Effective school-community relations are absolutely essential for the proper understanding and support of public education.

Shirley Clement, former New Jersey State Coordinator for the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) warns, "Because of the various forms of news media, there always will be publicity about the schools. But this publicity will not always include the positive achievements."

Unfortunately, news stories are usually based on the negative—strikes, vandalism, underachievement as shown by test scores, internal turmoil, to name but a few. The burden of assuring that the general public also is made aware of the positive achievements of their local schools rests squarely on the shoulders of the school district itself. Clearly, the public relations aspect of school management warrants the same careful attention and review as any other school program.

Rising taxes and the changing economy are not only factors but are strong motives contributing to this increasingly questioning demeanor. Communities want tangible benefits for their tax dollars and the public vote on school budgets is the only area of public spending in which the community has any voice and can express its opinion regarding public education. The rising costs of public education and the inevitable impact on

taxes has increased the need for widespread public financial support of local school systems. School districts have been forced into a position of explaining, defending, and justifying their existence.

School board members and administrators have reacted to this new public demand for information with varying responses, sometimes sincere, occasionally resentful, and oftentimes frustrated. The issue is complicated by a basic fact that most educators suffer from a significant lack of professional training in communications and public relations. Many administrators who recognize the real necessity of effective community relations are ill-prepared to properly plan and launch a school-community relations program.

Too often, a school system's public relations program is limited to last-minute efforts on special issues. One of the most common mistakes made by school systems is to launch a communications program at bond referendum time. The public is not naive and will readily recognize that the school system's motivation stems from the need to secure public support.

School-community relations

The decreased public credibility in the schools is aggravated by inadequate information, "token" public relations programs, and worse, a complete lack of communications due to administrative resistance or naivete.

Public school educators cannot ignore the challenge of the rightful claim by the school community for involve-

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Carol MacDougall is a freelance school policy editor.

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ment and information. The success of public education depends on public support, and this sustenance is contingent on both performance and effective communication.

Advises Clement, "A strong public relations program that inspires public confidence and support in the schools is essential, for a school district can never be totally successful without community support."

If the general public is either uninterested, or worse, has negative attitudes towards a school system, the functioning of the district will suffer. For example, the attitudes of the students will, to a great extent, reflect the apathetic or negative attitudes of their parents which could lead to the financial implication of inadequate support for funding proposals.

The need for effective school-community relations programs must be recognized by everyone involved in education, not just by a few astute leaders. The public entry into the sanctuary of the schools must be greeted with openness and cooperation, not tolerance or hostility.

For a program to be successful, it must be systemwide, coordinated by a central office staff member, but implemented in every school building by every administrator and educator in the district. Good communication requires effective management and cooperation. Most successful school systems place their school-community relations functions at a high priority.

School boards should not fall into the trap of assuming that communications programs are a frill. Such programs may cost money, but they should be measured in terms of the overall size of the budget, district goals and objectives, and the long-term benefits for school and community.

School-community relations often break down when school leaders fail to

find out what their local communities really want to know about the schools. Instead of always telling the public, school officials should ask them.

Another dimension of this need for communication involves internal relations—communication among school board members, staff, and students. A well-managed program ensures that all school personnel, not just key administrators, receive inservice training in public relations. Newspaper headlines about board-administration disputes, teacher strikes, and student protests are glaring evidences of the grave inadequacy of existing internal communications systems. Mutual understanding and teamwork must begin within a school district in order to establish a positive hub with which to generate cooperative interaction with the community.

Advises Clement, "Every school district has a continual communications system, whether or not it is planned or apparent. Every day a student returns home from school and relays his impressions of his teacher, the school day, a class trip, or whatever, there is communication about the schools."

The district that does not have a systematic and comprehensive public relations program in place is vulnerable to the dangers of misinterpretation and misinformation.

Establishing a PR program

A good public relations or communications program is never a whitewash for a poor educational program. An effective communications program must be honest and specific, covering what Clement refers to as the triumverate of P's: *problems, plans, and progress* of the individual school system.

Building renewed confidence in public education must begin at the local school level. John H. Wherry, executive director of NSPRA, offers the following public relations tips for effective school-community communication:

- Establish an open-door visitation policy. Invite parents and community members to school and repeat the invitation often—in newsletters, in parent handbooks, in report card stuffers, by special individual invitation.
- Have a visitors' day for prospective students and their parents—not just for those of an entering class but for those at any level who may be considering attendance at one of your schools. Publicize it well throughout the community.
- Hold a principal's coffee at the school on a regular basis to draw parents and other visitors to the school for informal discussions.
- Encourage visits and participation by nonparents.
- Encourage elementary teachers to summarize the events and classroom progress of the day with their students and urge them to "tell your parents what you learned at school today."
- Hold small, informal neighborhood meetings in the homes of volunteers led by parents or students your staff has briefed to explain special programs, discuss curriculum changes, and answer other questions. These are particularly helpful for parents of the entering class or newcomers to the area.
- Organize a speakers bureau of students and teachers for parent/community group meetings.
- Take classes into the community: band rehearsals or art classes at shopping centers, for example, give the public a first-hand look at how a program works.
- Involve some of the more active parents in helping to evaluate and plan building level programs, such as assembly programs and discussion groups.

In addition, don't forget about the senior citizens in your community. Student performances and special visits to nursing homes and retirement communities can help win the support of this growing segment of our population. They vote, too.

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Board Member Communication: Do's and Don'ts

These tips give board members some rules for effective communication. The chart is excerpted from *Becoming A Better Board Member*, (National School Boards Association, \$17.95, Direct Affiliate Price, \$14.95).

- Set a policy and budget for communication
- Include communication in staff in-service programs
- Follow through on questions and concerns
- Avoid surprises between board members and the superintendent
- Keep professional and other staff members informed
- Don't hastily make or change policy to meet a crisis
- Visit schools regularly
- Conduct an annual attitude survey
- Keep in touch with constituents by phone or mail
- Become part of a speakers bureau for your schools
- Turn people on with your own enthusiasm
- Take random sampling of opinion on "hot" or emerging issues
- Introduce yourself to people at board meetings
- Don't over-react to situations
- Have a regular newsletter to staff, the community, and special groups
- Answer all correspondence
- Keep an "open door" policy
- Be diplomatic
- Keep news clippings of articles on the school system
- Be visible at school and civic events

Use of citizens' committees

With proper planning, the use of citizens' advisory committees can be a fundamental stepping stone to improving school-community relations. Planned and purposeful involvement of dedicated citizens provides essential support and unique perspectives and approaches to school system issues.

Ignoring this citizen base, which frequently includes knowledgeable people whose views and experiences reveal unanticipated insights and solutions, not only limits your problem-solving resources but ultimately could lead to resentment and resistance toward proposals.

Where to begin

Establishing and developing organized, sound, broad-based school-community relations should begin with the following:

- an up-to-date board policy on the district's public relations program;
- a sincere and honest commitment to the program by the school board, staff, and the entire administrative team;

- a commitment to an on-going, year-round program;
- the expectation that all questions from the public will be answered openly and honestly. (Generally speaking, the only areas where there should be any caution are legal, personnel, and individual student issues.);
- the designation of one staff member to coordinate the program in order to ensure its continuity and overall supervision;
- and the use of a variety of communication techniques and tools such as newspapers, school system and local school newsletters, public meetings, and the involvement of "key communicators" in the community.

In essence, a successful school-community relations program must be anticipatory, continuous, honest, and open. It must not focus on achievements while at the same time concealing deficiencies. It must encourage total school and

community awareness of the plans, problems, and progress of the schools.

A well-planned, systematic, two-way process of communication between the schools and the community will bring about understanding, acceptance, and support on the part of both the internal and external communities in your school system. The benefits of properly executed efforts will be tangible. ■

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the scope of their official duties (*Supen*, N.Y. App., 1983). Thus, if the administrator's report to, for example, the board is wrong and even negligent, he is not liable for defamation unless it is shown that his report was actuated by malice.

Other examples

Other stereotypes and myths about legal requirements for teacher evaluation are rife in the profession and are ripe for correction. For example, allegations of discrimination in evaluation based on race, sex, or handicap often are unsuccessful; the plaintiff-evaluated faces a high burden of proof. Similarly, the belief that courts strictly require validation of teacher evaluation instruments is not at all supported by the case law to date.

As another example, in collective bargaining jurisdictions, the assumption that teacher evaluation must be negotiated and arbitrated is unwarranted; its negotiability, grievability, and arbitrability vary widely depending on state law and local contracts. Similarly overbroad is the notion that the failure to comply strictly with state legislation and regulations specific to evaluation is fatal. For example, in Pennsylvania, which has relatively specific state requirements, school authorities have prevailed over the challenging teachers in 80 percent of the approximately 32 reported court decisions during the past two decades.

Maintain clear purpose

The bottom-line message is *not* that administrators should run roughshod and trample teachers in the evaluation process. Rather, administrators may not use the law as an alibi for evaluation practices that are not effective for instructional improvement and personnel decisions. The law provides administrators with the room to use the maturing "state of the art" of teacher evaluation, which includes establishing collaboration with teachers, linking evaluation instruments to research, building in training and accountability for evaluators, and tying evaluation directly to staff development. ■



court view

Watch out for the law when evaluating teachers!

by Perry A. Zirkel

Shifting enrollments, tightening budgets, and the push for educational reform have increased public and professional attention to teacher evaluation. Researchers and practitioners have recognized that limitations in the time and training of evaluators—and in the instruments and procedures for evaluation—make this area vulnerable to criticism and attack. Inasmuch as negative ratings may lead to discipline, reassignment, or dismissal, legal action is not a mere theoretical possibility.

The law is often an excuse for teacher evaluation being reduced to what Guthrie and Willower called "ceremonial congratulations." In a recent study in Pennsylvania, for example, Langlois and Colarusso found that over 98 percent of the teachers who were rated on a state-mandated 80-point scale received a perfect score of 80. When school systems that had obtained approval to use an alternate form were included, less than one-quarter of one percent of the teachers were evaluated as unsatisfactory.

Legal foundations

Legal requirements concerning teacher evaluation come from what, on first glance, may appear to be a bewildering array of sources. The federal Constitution mandates freedom of expression, due process, and equal protection of the law. Federal civil rights statutes provide special protections for minority, female, and handicapped teachers among others. State statutes and regulations often spell out requirements for the who and how of teacher evaluation. And local policies and contracts may well add further restrictions. Beleaguered and defensive

administrators may be overcome with fear or frustration, resulting in paralysis or ritualistic practice that does not provide the intended basis for instructional improvement or personnel decision making.

A review of the case law, however, reveals a wide margin for administrative discretion. Courts tend to defer to the judgment of school authorities in matters of professional expertise, such as teacher evaluation, according them a presumption of good faith and reasonableness. Examination of the common characterizations of the law against the actual, applicable legal precedents is important.

Student performance

"Student test scores may not be part of the basis for teacher evaluation that leads to dismissal." Not so.

Both the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals (*Scheelbaase*, 1973) and the Minnesota Supreme Court (*Whalen*, 1982) have upheld termination of teachers based in part on test scores. A more recent decision (*St. Louis*, 1987) was less conclusive. Although using student test scores as the sole basis for teacher evaluation would certainly be suspect, their use as part of a comprehensive evaluation system would generally appear more likely than not to be upheld by the courts.

Evaluation for improvement

"Providing specific suggestions and extensive time for improvement is judicially regarded as an essential element of teacher evaluation." Again, not quite so.

In cases where state statute or local contracts provide this specific requirement, the court will tend to uphold it (*Wilt*, W. Va., 1982; *Board of Educ.*, Ill.

App., 1980); *Merrymaking*, Me., 1976). However, with some exceptions (*Perren*, Mich. App., 1987), courts will not generally impose such a requirement as a matter of law.

First Amendment rights

"Courts will not uphold dismissals based on evaluations that were affected by the outspokenness of the teacher-evaluated." Again, an overstatement.

Courts will not sustain the First Amendment defense of a teacher whose outspokenness was directed at intra-school or intra-district, not public, issues. Even if the issues are of legitimate community concern, the teacher will not be protected if (1) the resulting friction in school operations outweighs the weight of the public issues, (2) his speaking out was not a substantial or motivating factor for the dismissal, or (3) he would have been terminated regardless of this outspokenness.

Thus, although teachers have successfully passed these hurdles in some cases (*Hinkle*, 7th Cir., 1984; *Eckerd*, D. Del., 1979), they have lost their share of such First Amendment cases (*Foreman*, La. App., 1978; *Kriarr*, 7th Cir., 1972).

Defamation threats

"Administrators are wide open to defamation suits if they communicate negative teacher evaluations to others as part of their responsibilities." Another example of "mythful" thinking.

As courts have made clear (*Manquso*, Cal. App., 1984; *Buckner*, Tex. App., 1981), administrators generally have a qualified immunity for reporting evaluation results to others, unless their communication is to persons beyond

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Tips 'n Techniques

How are your school/press relations?

Even the best school system or school board member depends on publicity—usually newspapers—to communicate with citizens. Accurate and balanced news reporting must be a high priority for school officials. Community support for education is based on the quality of the product as well as the public image of the school system.

But it just does not happen. Scheduling and conducting meetings, announcements, and the general availability of school officials can contribute to quality news coverage.

Tired of grousing about biased, incomplete, and inaccurate stories? Ready for reporters to write some good school news instead of just searching for the bad? Whatever the editorial position of a newspaper, the thoroughness of the coverage largely depends on the relationship between the reporter and school officials.

Who speaks for the board?

School board members can speak for their constituents but not for other board members. Prudent members will avoid criticizing fellow board members. In discussing a school board matter with a reporter, stick to the issues—and avoid personalities or past vendettas. (News articles will always lead with the controversy, sometimes at the expense of the more important issues, if given the chance.) Defer to the school superintendent or staff person on administrative matters.

How to handle reporters

For successful press relations, take the initiative with reporters. Tell them your schedule, especially the best times to reach you by phone, both at home and work.

Find out their background. Talk about yours. Open up the lines of communication and reporters will be able to quote you more accurately and fairly.

Find out the newspaper deadlines. Be available for photographs and prepare copies of speeches or announcements. Reporters may be able to give you valuable information, so ask questions! Find

out which editor writes the editorials on education so you know who to call to air a concern.

Be prepared for the "tough" question. Take time to develop your thoughts on the issues facing your school district. Be thoughtful, but make sure the reporter does not interpret hesitancy as an effort to dodge the issue.

Try to give information during meetings and interviews in an easy-to-write and quotable style. Use language the reporter and community can understand. Avoid educational jargon.

Most importantly, never lose control, no matter how provocative or infuriating the question. As public officials, school board members set an example for the community.

Staff liaison

Even small school districts benefit from a staff liaison charged with press relations. Having one primary contact person minimizes the chance of inaccurate reporting and wasted time spent trying to get information.

Send news releases, meeting schedules, and press conference notices well in advance. Newspapers thrive on current and future news, not an event that occurred three weeks ago. Include school newsletters and other information in press packets to keep reporters up to date with local education.

Check on the reporter's satisfaction with the community relations/press liaison. Also get feedback from staff on reporter accuracy and thoroughness. As the crucial link between the community and its schools, board members should be aware of problems before they receive the complaints.

The newspaper business

Do not always blame the reporter for the story that appears in print. Most newspapers have two or more editors who review articles prior to their publication.

Give feedback. Tell the reporter if you were misquoted or a position was ignored. Try to resolve any problems directly with the reporter. Contact the

editor or publisher only as a last resort. But remember to praise a well-written and fair article. Take the time to call a reporter after reading an especially good or bad story. If you wait to react until the next time you are called for a quote, the article in question may be old news and stale for the reporter.

Few things can infuriate school officials more than a story's lead or headline. Either can distort instead of clarify the subject at hand. Take issue with it, but live with it, and hope the article provides the context and explanation. Editors and publishers, not the reporters, usually set the style for these attention-grabbers.

Reporters vie for scoops or exclusives, but savvy school officials let them dig it out. Give all competing newspapers fair and equal consideration. Reward a favorite reporter with praise, not inside information.

"Off the record" remarks are often standard fare of reporter/school official communication. Use them sparingly, if at all. Unless you are sure of a reporter's trustworthiness, it is risky. A legitimate question deserves a quotable answer.

Practical tips

Reporters' dispositions can affect both their accuracy and outlook on education. Try to make the environment at meetings as pleasant as possible with designated seating, paper and pens, and good lighting. Consider these practical tips:

- Have nameplates in front of school board members and administrators for easy identification of speakers.
- Speak clearly and slowly. Stay near the microphone without leaning back in a chair. Speak loudly if there are no microphones.

The bottom line is: Help each other to promote schools in your community. ■



Policy Adviser

How can a school system effectively impress upon a community its commitment to public involvement in the schools?—Superintendent, New York

The first step to successful school-community relations is in policy endorsement. The school board must declare its appreciation of the importance of public involvement in the schools. A school policy manual is the board's official statement of intent, and, as such, should include policies that recognize the public's "right to know" and the mutual benefits of school-community involvement.

The key areas to address in policy, all according to the EPS/NSBA policy classification system, are:

- Community Involvement in Decisionmaking, ABA (Also KC);

Be prepared

Eventually, all school boards will face a crisis. Be prepared by attending NSBA's Leadership Seminar on "Crisis Management: How to Avoid a Crisis and What to Do When One Occurs," on May 13-14, 1988, in Denver, Colo. For more information, contact: NSBA, 1680 Duke St., Alexandria, Va. 22314 (703/838-6722).

- Advisory Committees to the Board, BCF;
- School-Community Relations Goals, KA.

Section K of the EPS/NSBA policy classification system addresses general relations with the public and with other community and public agencies. Policies established in these areas can provide a solid framework on which to build effective school-community public relations.

There are some important guidelines to consider whenever you establish new policy or revise existing statements. For example, when developing local policy on citizens' advisory committees, be sure to include the following:

- a statement defining the composition of the committee's membership;
- language clearly delineating the scope and breadth of the citizens' involvement—clarification of the *advisory* status of such committees in keeping with the board's role as the legally constituted decision-making authority;
- a statement regarding the time-line within which the committee will function that differentiates between standing committees and ad hoc committees that may be established for a particular, short-term purpose.

The adoption of such a policy or poli-

cies should be well-publicized to alert the general public to the board's decision to actively seek community input for the benefit of the schools.

Of course, always consider staffing requirements when adopting a new policy. The coordination and implementation of the program may require assignment to or addition of a particular staff member. Budgetary considerations are important and realistic allocations should be set before any new program is undertaken.

For more policy help

Sample policies and regulations relating to topics covered in this month's *Updating* are included in the school administrator's copy of this publication. These are:

School-Community Relations: BCF, Advisory Committees; KA-R, School-Community Relations Goals; KBA, Public's Right to Know; KC, (Also ABA) Community Involvement in Decisionmaking; KD-R, (Also BDDH-R), Public Participation at Board Meetings.

Relations with News Media: KBC, News Media Relations.

Additional sample policies, regulations, or exhibits on these and other topics may be requested from the EPS Policy Information Clearinghouse, NSBA, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314.



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